EVER WONDER HOW SOME MUSTANGS SURVIVED AND OTHERS DIDN'T? THIS VINTAGE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE GIVES A FEW CLUES

Mr. Denman's MUSTANG

Sometimes the survival of an individual Mustang was just a matter of luck. Using a newspaper article from 14 April 1963, we have learned a few interesting facts concerning a former Royal Canadian Air Force P-51D. The paper was the *Syracuse Herald-Journal* and James Cosgrove wrote the article that was published on that date.

The article begins:

To Ray Denman, they were slaughtering a pair of once-mighty eagles. Denman, driving past an old runway at Hancock Field *(EDITOR'S NOTE: We think this is one of numerous mistakes in the article. Almost certainly, the field was the small airport at Canastota, New York, where Fred Ritts and Jim Defuria were operating as Intercontinental Airways. As many as 30 ex-RCAF Mustangs arrived at the very small field and the pair had the intent of illegally operating a Mustang force in the Caribbean and Latin America but they were shut down by the Feds)*, about a year ago and winced when he spotted wrecking crews hacking into pieces two WWII fighter planes.

The fighters, F-51 Mustangs, like those that gunned down Zeros and Messerschmitts over the Pacific and Europe, were being beaten into bits. The men swung axes and hammers into the aluminum skin on the tapering wings and fuselages. Soon the ships were skeletons, destined for the scrap heap.

Noticing that another Mustang parked near the doomed pair had not yet been touched by the crews, Denman, a licensed pilot who "likes to collect gadgets," acted quickly. He located the owner, a Syracuse industrialist, and bought the aircraft.

"I just had to save one of those babies," Denman declared. "They were being torn to bits."

The plane, still in flyable condition *(EDITOR'S NOTE: The Mustang was far from flyable)*, now is parked across from Denman's auto sales firm at Route 11 in Brewerton.

"It was quite a job towing it here from the airport, up Route 11, but well worth the trouble," he declared.

Four-years earlier, in 1958, 30 of the high-powered aircraft — bound for the Caribbean — rattled windows around Hancock Field *(EDITOR'S NOTE: Again, an incorrect identification)* as they swirled over the runway and landed.

Flown down from Canada, the sassy machines taxied along the asphalt strip and were parked in long, neat rows. They were scheduled to go back into the air again soon *en route* to the then friendly Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

However, the stopover at Syracuse, because of an unexpected snarl of international red tape, stretched into weeks, months, and then years. The deal, helmed by a speculative Syracusan, never went through. The US State Department refused permit for sale.

Sold as surplus, the planes had cost $4000 each *(EDITOR'S NOTE: Way on the high side),* Denman purchased his for less than 1/8th that price.

In order to transport the more than 1400-hp aircraft to Brewerton, Denman had to obtain clearance from state highway authorities. Fourteen flagmen and two state troopers directed traffic around the plane as it was towed to Brewerton.

Not all the original Mustang squadron was destroyed by the ax-wielding crews. Two, sold to flying buffs, unaccustomed to the fighters' power and maneuverability, crashed at Canastota Airport. The first spun dizzily down the runway on its belly after the landing gear refused to go down *(EDITOR'S NOTE: Flown by experienced pilot Lynn Garrison, the P-51 had a gear failure and Garrison's skilled belly landing video is available on YouTube).* The other plane was demolished when it cartwheeled on takeoff. In both scrapes, the pilots escaped injury.

The other fighters were taken by a Midwestern aircraft firm and converted into pleasure planes *(EDITOR'S NOTE: Aero Enterprises in Indiana).*

Denman's Mustang, the only one remaining in the area, has proved quite an attraction for Route 11 motorists and youngsters in Brewerton. And occasionally a former wartime pilot passing the lot will stop and look at the outmoded, propeller-driven craft. Several told Denman, who never has been up in a Mustang, they piloted Mustangs during the years of Normandy and Iwo Jima.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although having some inaccuracies, the newspaper article profiles a rather quaint period in time when P-51s had basically no value. Mr. Denman certainly saved a Mustang from the scrappers. Denham, a USAF veteran, kept a seaplane anchored in his front yard on the Oneida River and would often fly the plane. He would go on to open an antique store and was involved in the local historical society while also collecting vintage cars. He was extremely well liked by the community and passed away on 18 February 1997. And what of the Mustang? The condition of the plane worsened and it was pushed to the back of the car lot and almost covered in vegetation. It was later sold, dismantled, and stored. In 1978, it was registered N4543. The plane was eventually rebuilt and is currently airworthy. However, over the past two-years the aircraft has been embroiled in a particularly nasty lawsuit between the current owner and a person that claims he owned the aircraft but that it had been stolen from him. To put it bluntly, it would be difficult to find two more unpleasant people and the lawsuit has done nothing for the overall good of the Warbird Movement. **MI**

The Mustang at Brewerton, New York, during 1966. This aircraft was built as 44-74543 and was delivered to the Royal Canadian Air Force on 6 January 1950 where it was assigned to No. 424 Squadron (Auxiliary) at Hamilton, Ontario. The fighter was struck off strength on 17 December 1959. We would like to appeal to readers who may have knowledge and photographs of the Mustangs at Canasota. We are trying to compile information for a definitive article on the P-51Ds of Intercontinental Airways and are in need of more facts and photographs. If you can help on this project detailing a time period when up to 30 Mustangs were parked on a small New York Field, then we would certainly like to get in touch. Please contact the editor at *moleary@challengeweb.com*.